

CIS summit: another mark on history of Russian-Ukrainian relations

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A few days ago the Commonwealth of Independent States marked its 10th anniversary with the summit of the CIS heads of states that was concluded in Moscow, as successfully as ever, on November 30. The summit was attended by all 12 heads of states of the CIS. Even President of Turkmenistan Saparmurat Niyazov who had ignored such gatherings for the past two years, attended the event.

The summit brought nothing new to the transformation of the CIS, and its outcomes were easy to predict. Within the past years, the CIS summits have transformed into presidential discussion clubs for talks that do not go far beyond that. However, the recent event was held in the new reality – from the changes in foreign policy relations between some countries to a new pragmatic policy pursued nowadays by the President of the Russian Federation and Russia's new foreign policy doctrine. For the recent decade Russia has been the key player of the CIS scene.

Strictly speaking, the CIS has never been an international organization *de jure*, as it was not registered at such institutions as the UN. Hence, logically, its decisions were not binding. The Russian Federation has dominated the structure informally but steadily, as it has played the key role in for the formation from the very start.

From the very start, the CIS was both an effort to find a way for a peaceful separation of the former «sister nations» and the process of searching for mechanisms for that. However, the processes of «civilized divorce» have not become a guarantee against the emergence of conflicts, latent and otherwise, on the territory of the CIS. The conflicts in the Nagorny Karabakh, Abkhazia, the Transdnister remain unsettled.

However, Ukraine may not be regarded as a full-fledged member of the CIS. In 1993 the parliament refused to ratify the CIS Charter. It also did not approve of the involvement of Ukraine in the Tashkent pact on collective security. Hence, from the very start Ukraine has occupied a cautious position on the issue. To date, Georgia, Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan have withdrawn from the pact. For all the regional difference, the main reason for the withdrawal was the same: the dissatisfaction with Moscow's domination and the increase of the role of the official Kremlin in the regions.

The CIS has not offered an opportunity to receive clear and suitable answers to questions of inter-regional cooperation – which was clearly demonstrated by the emergence of the entities like the GUUAM and the Eurasian Union. In the case of the GUUAM, the key reason for establishing the initiative was seen as the growing inability to settle economic and political questions within the CIS according to the countries' own national interests, while the key role in the CIS has been played by Russia. As the CIS was transforming into a political discussion club, the GUUAM was meant as a joint search for new forms of inter-regional cooperation and equal partnership.

Hence, the decade of the CIS can be seen as a history of gradual disintegration of the former Soviet Union and its political and economic consequences. Within the decade, the CIS has failed to offer solutions for saving the national economies from crises. The issues of economic cooperation, trade and regional ties remain hindered by a variety of problems. The recent summit confirmed the diagnoses, notwithstanding some optimistic facts. In particular, the issue of establishing a free trade area that has been repeatedly raised by Ukraine still remains a task for the future.

Only eight countries out of 12, Ukraine included, have so far ratified the trade agreement. The lack of provisions of the free movement of goods between the CIS states have caused substantial damage, as the trade turnover has been reduced by 30 percent, as the 2000 results showed. There is a problem of double taxation that makes a number of goods less competitive.

However, cooperation between the CIS countries seems more likely in the fields of common action against terrorism and deepening military and military-technical cooperation. This conclusion is

suggested by the joint statement adopted by the presidents of the CIS states. According to the document, the CIS heads of states view multilateral military and military-technical cooperation between their states, strengthening of the CIS air defense system included, as a substantial contribution to security. However, so far it is unclear what mechanisms will be used by Ukraine (as it has joint the statement) if it goes on in «strengthening the joint CIS air defense system». What sort of «joint» action is meant?

The statement also stressed the need for better coordination of security services and better support for the CIS Anti-terrorist Center. The Center was established by the session of the Council of the Heads of the Governments of the CIS states on June 21, 2000 and formalized by the Resolution on the Anti-terrorist Center in September 2000. The document provided that the Center was a permanent specialized body that would coordinate the CIS activities in fighting international terrorism. The document was signed by Ukraine with certain reservations: for instance, it was initially stressed that he Ukrainian bodies would be involved only after the Ukrainian parliament ratified it. The law «On Ratification of the Decisions on the Anti-terrorist Center of the Participating States of the Commonwealth of Independent States» was adopted on October 4, 2001 by 306 votes.

Therefore, nowadays Ukraine may be fully involved in «continuous pursuit, on the legal basis, of a complex of joint measures for fighting international terrorism and narcoaggression» (UNIAN, November 30, 2001). Also, as some statements expressed at the summit suggest, Ukraine may soon become an observer at the European Economic Community. Before, Ukraine avoided involvement in that structure.

The jubilee summit was also marked by a meeting of the Ukrainian president and his Russian counterpart on November 29, and certain statements and comments that could show that the vector of Ukraine's foreign policy tilted in the direction of Russia again, and built up the risk of overshadowing the vector of European integration, repeatedly declared by the Ukrainian top officials as the state's strategic goal. Trying to minimize possible criticism about the change in Ukraine's «foreign policy decorations», President Kuchma announced that «raising the question who Ukraine is which – Europe or Russia – is incorrect, it equals the choice between bread and water, between the roof of the foundation of a house.» According to Kuchma, Vladimir Putin's recent statements abroad, in particular, the one in Washington D.C., have proved that Russia is a supporter of European integration. Meanwhile, as Kuchma noted, «Europe is not just the eastern shores of the Atlantic but also the western slopes of the Urals» (UNIAN, November 29, 2001). As the results of the meeting suggest, a Europe that is closer and native to the official Ukraine is «the western slopes of the Urals». Hence, the current Ukrainian political elite may choose a rather speculative tactics of European integration for Ukraine that can be defined as «into Europe together with Russia». This specific claim has become increasingly popular among some representatives of the Ukrainian political elite who have business interests in deeper economic cooperation with Russia.

Observers could also note the increase in of the degree to which the Ukrainian president praises his Russian counterpart's policies. In 2000, for instance, during another Moscow-based summit Leonid Kuchma commented that «president Vladimir Putin is really a new Russia and a new policy» that is more pragmatic, understandable and predictable, «which is in Ukraine's interests» (Uriadovyi Kurrier, June 23, 2000). At the current stage of the relationship it may be seen that the admiration with the Russian policies and the Russian president has grown: «in the person of President Putin Ukraine ... sees a reliable, predictable from all points of view politician, which cannot fail to be reflected on the relations between our countries, the peoples» (TSN, 1+1, November 29, 2001), Leonid Kuchma announced.

The Russian-Ukrainian relations have become warmer regardless of the Russian civilian plane destroyed by the Ukrainian air defense troops, and the gas debts. The main results of the bilateral meeting may be seen in the commitment to sign an intergovernmental agreement in the free trade area in the first quarter of 2002, to take into account mutual interests in the issues of gas transit through the territory of Ukraine, cooperation in the space industry and aircraft-building.

While economic issues were predominant among the subjects of the Ukrainian-Russian meeting, there was a clear «humanitarian» flavor. The discussion was made symbolic by the announcement of the year of 2002 to be the year of Ukraine in the Russian Federation. By the way, the process of «studying each other may not be finished there for the two «brother peoples»: the Ukrainian president announced that

2003 would be the year of Russia in Ukraine.

President Kuchma also spoke in favor of closer cooperation between Ukraine and Russia in the military-technical sphere. In his opinion, Ukraine and Russia could perform in the military-technical sphere together more effectively, than separately. He said he could quote multiple examples «when the effect from joint cooperation was far better than if the countries worked separately». According to the Ukrainian president, «we had ran away to our national flats too fast, and neither of the parties got anything but losses. Within these years we have become even more lagging behind the West technologically [that before]» (UNIAN, November 29, 2001). In a sense, this claim does reflect part of the reality. On the other hand, it contains significant positioning: the division to «we» and «the West». Rather symptomatic was the comparison of mentality of Russians and Ukrainians – and making them not in favor of the West. According to President Kuchma, mentalities of Russians and Ukrainians are very similar: «we feel equally awkward abroad, we are different – [we are] honest, sincere» (korrespondent.net, November 30, 2001).

While such statements do not mean more than lip service, economic issues are more significant, particular if they have some political flavor. For instance, the current political position of the Ukrainian top leadership was reflected in President Kuchma's statement regarding the EBRD loan for completing the construction of the nuclear power reactors at the Rivne and the Khmelnytsky NPP (R2 and K4). Commenting on the would-be loan, Leonid Kuchma announced that the EBRD's conditions were «unacceptable for Ukraine» (UNIAN, November 29, 2001). «We will not accept them at any conditions. That is eternal bondage for Ukraine» (UNIAN, November 30, 2001), he stressed.

Meeting with ambassadors of the EBRD member states on November 30, Vice Prime Minister of Ukraine Vasyl Rohovyi announced that Ukraine was satisfied with the dynamics of cooperation with the EBRD, but seemed to share President Kuchma's belief that there had been problems with the loan for finishing the reactors. It was announced that the government of Ukraine had requested that the leadership of the EBRD clarified conditions for providing the loan «so that we could successfully begin and successfully complete this project» (UNIAN, November 30, 2001). Meanwhile, during the meeting with President Putin it was announced that Ukraine offered Russia «at any conditions, to take part in completing the construction of the compensatory capacities at the Rivne and the Khmelnytsky NPP,» as Leonid Kuchma put it.

According to the 2000 data of the Inter-departmental Commission for Complex Solution of Problems of the Chornobyl NPP, the closure down of the Chornobyl NPP could be compensated for by starting reactors #2 of the Khmelnytsky NPP or #4 of the Rivne NPP, and ensuring funding of supply of fuel for thermal power stations until the reactors are started. The introduction of the K-2 and R-4 was estimated to cost about \$1.5 billion (Uriadovyi Kurrier, June 3, 2000). There is no doubt that Russia is prepared to help Ukraine to complete the construction «at any conditions». That is the issue of economics and, probably, the issue of prestige. It is important, however, that the observance of environmental standards, on which the EBRD insisted, is not ignored now.

This level of deeper cooperation with Russia and refusal to cooperate with international institutions may have a substantial negative impact on Ukraine's investment climate, which is already bad as it is, at least in the eyes of Western investors. Meanwhile, opportunities for Russian investors may increase. While in Moscow, Leonid Kuchma had a number of talks with representatives of the Russian large business – for instance, with chairman of the board of the Lukoil Vagit Alikperov, to discuss activities of those businesses in Ukraine, development of their Ukrainian infrastructure and funding of the Lukoil-Ukraine plant in Odessa (Uriadovyi Kurrier, November 30, 2001). Probably, the Russian «investments» in Ukraine's politics (particularly in the pre-election period, particularly in the information environment) will increase alongside with the business investments.

The Russian foreign policy doctrine has been implemented effectively both within the CIS format and bilaterally. Under the circumstances it is critical for the Ukrainian authorities to ensure that the relations are adequate to the national interests and, finally, to add more clarity to the notorious multi-vector approach pursued by the Ukrainian foreign policy establishment.